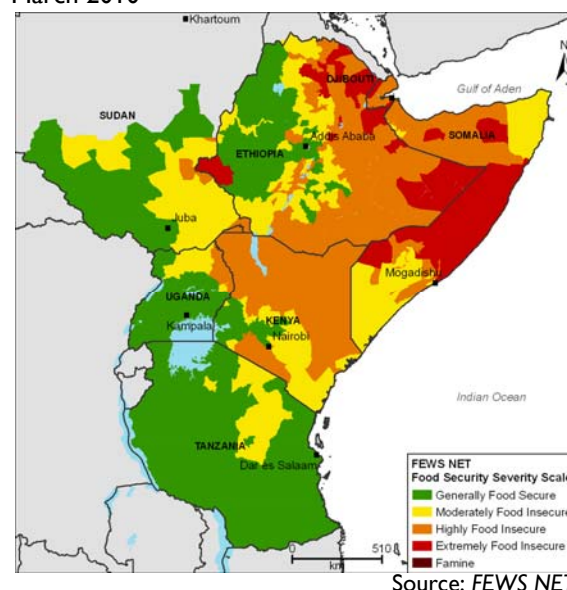


## EAST AFRICA Regional Food Security Update

March 2010

- A modest improvement in food security in the region has occurred since December 2009 due to the mild El Niño season of October-December, which improved rangeland conditions and boosted production from marginal agricultural areas. However, high to extreme food security persists in the eastern sector of the region due to the lingering effects of consecutive seasonal failures, poor production of the main cropping areas of southern Sudan and parts of Ethiopia, as well as conflicts and insecurity.
- Due to past below-normal cropping conditions in parts of southern Ethiopia, southern Sudan, and northeastern and northern Uganda, acute food deficits could set in two to three months earlier than normal. Food insecurity among both the rural and urban populations of Djibouti is likely to increase. Increased insecurity in Somalia and southern Sudan will continue to undermine food security gains by hindering humanitarian and market access.
- The March to May seasonal forecast points to a near-normal season, which implies favorable cropping conditions in the main cropping areas. A near-normal season is likely to improve food security conditions in Kenya, southern Somalia, and Tanzania. However, an early cessation could occur in the marginal agricultural areas. The expansive warming over the Indian Ocean may also cause erratic rainfall, associated with episodic heavy storms, as currently being experienced in the region. The normal to above-normal forecast in the greater Mendera Triangle is critical for sustaining recovery of pastoral livelihoods. Due to the relatively low level of confidence in the forecast after May, regular monitoring is advised, especially in the hotspot areas in the eastern sector currently exhibiting high to extreme food security.

**Figure 1.** Current food security conditions, March 2010



### Food Security Overview

Although modest improvement in food security conditions in the region has occurred since December 2009, as a result of near-normal to above-normal October-December seasonal rains, moderate to extreme food insecurity continues to occur in the eastern sector of the greater Horn of Africa (Figure 1 and Table 1). This is due to the lingering effects of droughts, especially in the pastoral areas of the region that experienced consecutive seasonal failures until the last October-December rains, as well as lower than average food harvests, and high or increasing food prices for a variety of reasons including conflict/insecurity, low poor harvests, and increasing fuel and transportation costs, among others. There is a general improvement in rangeland conditions with the exception of parts of central, northern, and northeast Somalia, and north-central parts of Kenya, where drought is deepening because of below-normal performance of the October seasonal rains, and the dry season continues. These conditions are likely to result in continued livestock migration, high malnutrition, and livestock mortality. High levels of acute malnutrition are reported in many areas, especially most of south-central Somalia, where malnutrition levels are critical to very critical, as well as parts of the north-central pastoral areas of Kenya, where the MUAC monitoring shows an increase in the population “at risk of malnutrition.” It is expected that due to increasing water scarcity, as the dry season progresses, there is a high likelihood that malnutrition rates could continue to

increase beyond the emergency threshold of 15 percent in these areas. An increase in malnutrition rates during the hot and dry January to March season is normal.

An earlier-than-normal start of the hunger season (by two to three months) is expected in Ethiopia (especially the lowland areas of SNNPR and Gambella as well as eastern *meher* cropping areas), southern Sudan, northern and northeastern Uganda, mainly due to below-normal crop production, and Djibouti, due to the failure of the January coastal rains, increasing food insecurity among the rural pastoralist population. Consequently, food insecurity is likely to increase from March in Djibouti, Ethiopia, Somalia, and Uganda (Table 1).

Throughout the region, prices of key staple continue to be above the five-year average, which will continue to affect food access of net-food buying (or market dependent) households (see Price annex). The recent spikes in global oil trends are likely to keep transportation and production costs high, thus sustaining the current food prices above the five-year average (Figure 2). Increased conflicts in the region especially Somalia and southern Sudan are also likely to continue to restrict normal trade flow patterns and induce low supply conditions likely to increase prices of key staples in these areas, where structural food security problems are also widespread.

The population facing high or extreme food insecurity remains at high levels, although the current food insecure population is estimated to be a decrease from the October 2009 estimate of 17.6 million people (Table 1).

### Seasonal Progress

Because of the prevailing dry conditions, no significant improvements in food security are expected in the region until after the onset of the main March to May rains. However, the dry season in pastoral areas is expected to be less severe due to the good performance of the October-December season, as well as unseasonable rains received in late February/early March in many areas, which increased pasture biomass and prolonged water availability well into the season. The only exceptions to this are 1) north-central Kenya; 2) central and northeastern Somalia, and 3) coastal pastoral areas of Djibouti, where dry conditions are expected to continue until the start of the March-May seasonal rains.

The latest satellite data (Figure 3) show unseasonal and above-normal rainfall in February 2010 over Somali and Afar regions of Ethiopia, as well as parts of north-central pastoral Kenya and north-central Somalia. This could improve vegetation and pasture conditions, which are currently below normal in many pastoral areas (circled areas in Figure 4) and water availability and ease the effects of poor performance of October-December seasonal rains. In other areas such as the southeastern lowlands it could destroy crops yet to be harvested. These rains are expected to continue over the next seven days according to the Global Forecast System (GFS) 7-day forecast. At this time rainfall is concentrated in the southern parts

**Table 1:** Estimated number of food insecure population requiring humanitarian support in the region

Country	Oct '09	Feb '10	Likely Trend (Mar-Jun '10)
Djibouti	0.08	0.08	Increase
Ethiopia	6.2	5.23	Increase
Kenya	3.8	3.8*	Significant decrease to under 2 million
Somalia	3.6	3.6**	Stable
Southern Sudan	1.3	1.8	Increase
Tanzania	1.5	*	Significant Decrease
Uganda	1.14	1.4	Increase
Total	17.63		

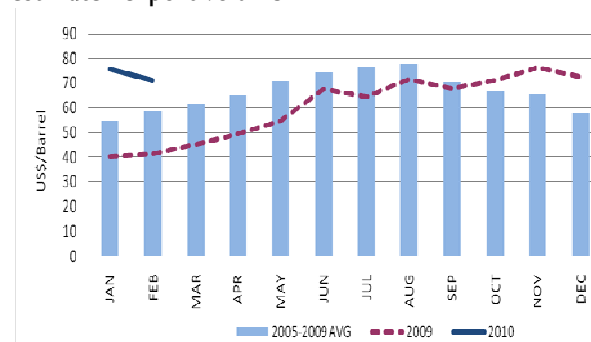
Source: FEWS NET

\* Projected to decrease significantly after the on-going seasonal food security assessments

\*\* FSNAU and partners estimated this figure at 3.2 million.

However this estimate was made before the WFP suspension of aid and consequent increase in cereal prices, as well as renewed conflict outbreaks in Mogadishu and resulting population displacements. FEWS NET estimates that the food insecure population will likely be above the 3.2 million figure in the coming months, even though a bumper harvest was realized during the lesser Oct-Dec cropping season, and unseasonable rains in February and March brought relief in many parts of the country.

**Figure 2:** Average spot price of crude oil weighted by estimated export volume



Source: US Energy Information Administration

of Tanzania, although the latest satellite data show that the amounts are slightly less than the climatological average. In central Tanzania, rains are sufficient for cropping in the unimodal cropping areas.

#### The March-May seasonal forecast and implications for food security

The IGAD Climate Prediction and Applications Centre (ICPAC) consensus outlook forecast indicates generally near-normal conditions for the March to May season, over the equatorial sector where the season is most important (Figure 5). Based on the analogue years of 2003 and 2007 for the forecast, this season is likely to be marked by a timely onset with peak rainfall occurring in April. Early cessation could occur in the marginal agricultural areas. In addition, the expansive warming over the Indian Ocean could be beneficial in bringing more rains although the current episodic heavy storms currently being seen in the eastern sector of the region could be associated with disruptive localized flooding. On the other hand, it could create a tropical depression leading to more erratic rainfall in the southeastern marginal areas. This forecast is relevant only for seasonal time scales and relatively large areas. Therefore, local and month-to-month variations may occur and users are strongly advised to contact their National Meteorological Services for interpretation of this outlook, finer details, regular updates and additional guidance. The level of confidence after May is relatively low because of the transition period from El Niño to near neutral conditions.

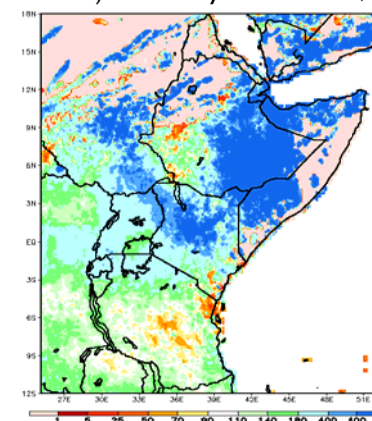
However, if the forecast materializes, it would provide favourable cropping conditions in the main cropping areas, notably: southern Somalia, the main cropping areas of western Kenya, bimodal cropping areas of Uganda, and *belg* cropping areas of Ethiopia.

The normal to above-normal conditions projected in the greater Mandera Triangle will be critical for the recovery of pastoral areas, especially northcentral Kenya, where the October-December season was below normal (although the current unseasonal rains in this areas could ease the present drought conditions), Borena region of southern Ethiopia, and parts of southern Somalia. In the pastoral areas outside the Mandera Triangle, normal to below-normal conditions are projected, and are not likely to result in significant improvements because of the lingering effects of the past consecutive seasonal failures. Therefore, some degree of food insecurity could persist in northern Uganda, northcentral Kenya, central Somalia, and southeastern Ethiopia.

#### Conclusion

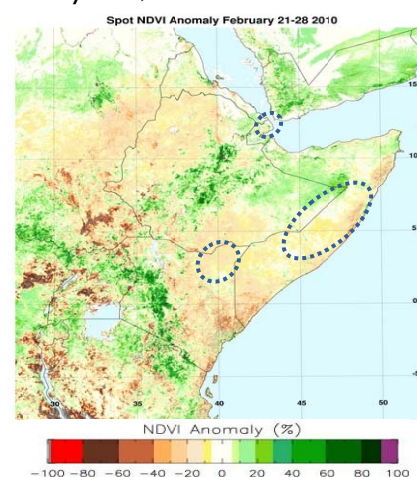
The March to May season is expected to be near normal in the eastern sector of the region. This will provide favorable cropping conditions in the main cropping areas for the March-May season subject to structural limitations to agricultural production such as low income, soil fertility, human capital, input constraints and pests and diseases. Therefore, food security is expected to continue improving in Kenya, southern Somalia, and Tanzania. However, policy efforts are needed to overcome these structural limitations to maximize the occurrence of favorable seasonal rains. Lingering effects of the El Niño event could also enhance rainfall performance, which is critical to the recovery of the greater Mandera Triangle. Due to the relatively low confidence in the forecast after May, it is essential to monitor hotspot areas currently facing high to extreme food insecurity as any departures from the near-normal forecast could deepen food insecurity in these areas.

**Figure 3: Rainfall Estimates (Percent of Normal) –February 1- March 03, 2010**



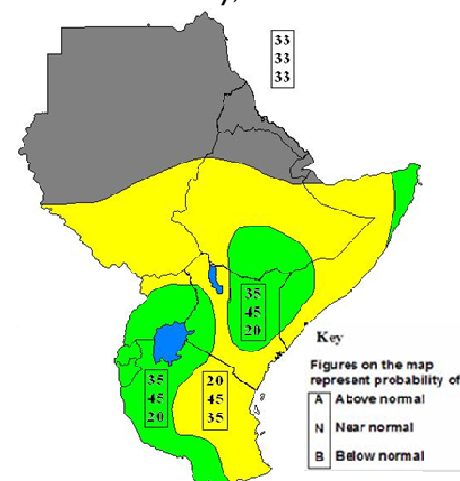
Source: USGS/FEWS NET

**Figure 4: Vegetation Conditions up to February 1-21, 2010**



Source: NASA/GSFC

**Figure 5: ICPAC Consensus Rainfall Forecast March-May, 2010**



Source: ICPAC